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Out of the Attic

'Wrought, Knit, Labors, Legacies'

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Olalekan Jeyifous's new installation at Waterfront Park is inspired by Alexandria's rich and complicated industrial and merchant history. Throughout its history, Alexandria evolved from a village of farms and plantations to a prosperous port town. Once home to one of the largest domestic slave markets in the country, Alexandria became a major center for shipping and manufacturing and is now a vibrant urban destination with historic charm.

"Wrought, Knit, Labors, Legacies" seeks to stitch Alexandria's story together, featuring symbols that represent Alexandria's merchant and manufacturing history, including factories, tobacco warehouses, breweries and railways. The ground mural incorporates African American quilting and textile traditions, which are historically tied to storytelling and oral tradition.

When viewed as a whole, the pattern appears as an abstract grid or map with the manufacturing icons appearing throughout. From this colorful and rich surface, four large figures arise and face the water. Ornate metal profiles are wrapped in sculptural seating platforms that are illuminated in low light.

"Wrought" means shaped, hammered or manufactured, a reference to the sculptures in the installation. It holds dual meaning, also signifying transformation through adversity, struggle or hardship.

"Knit" means to weave, stitch or unite, a reference to the ground mural that is inspired by African American narrative quilts. For this installation, it also alludes to the histories and futures of Alexandria's communities, inextricably intertwined.

"Labors" and "Legacies" employ multiple meanings from slave labor, to industrial labor, to the general work it takes for communities to evolve and grow. They also speak to the cultural inheritances that shape and define the city as it continues to evolve.

Based in Brooklyn, Olalekan Jeyifous has spent more than a decade creating large-scale artwork for public spaces. He was recently commissioned, along with Amanda Williams, to create the forthcoming monument for Shirley Chisholm in Brooklyn. He previously created public art at the 2017 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in California, Cleveland's Public Square and Starbucks' flagship store in Chicago.

He received a bachelor's of architecture degree from Cornell University. His work has been exhibited at the Studio Museum in Harlem, the MoMA, the Vitra Design Museum and the Guggenheim in Bilbao, Spain. He received grants and fellowships from the New York Foundation of the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts and the Brooklyn Arts Council. He's completed artist residencies with the Headlands Center for the Arts, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts and the Drawing Center's Open Sessions program and was a Wilder Green Fellow at the MacDowell Colony.

Jeyifous was commissioned to create an original site-specific work inspired by Alexandria. He was selected by a task force and approved by the Alexandria Commission for the Arts.

"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.